GRAZING RESERVES

PEACE RIVER

Alberta

FORESTRY, LANDS AND WILDLIFE

88-03292/

TO ALL VISITORS:

You are welcome at all provincial grazing reserves in Alberta, whether you are taking advantage of the recreational opportunities available or just enjoying the scenery and the great outdoors. But a word of CAUTION ....

The reserves are in a primitive state of development for recreational use and some areas have restricted use at certain times of the year. Although maps showing access points and designated routes are posted at each reserve to assist visitors, **always check with the reserve supervisor before entering a reserve.** He can advise you on local conditions and provide other useful information that will help ensure that you have a safe, pleasant visit.

Visitors are asked to observe the Use Respect Program and obtain access permission from the supervisor. Anyone who sees a violation of hunting or fishing regulations should call the nearest Fish and Wildlife Division office or the 24-hour toil free Outdoor Observer number, 1-800-642-3800.

For information concerning grazing reserve operations or the public access program in the Grande Prairie Region (Bear Canyon, Blueberry Mountain, Kleskun Lake, Valleyview, Wanham reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
Grande Prairie Grazing Reserves
Box 34, Room 3001, Provincial Building
10320 - 99 Street
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 6J4

Telephone: 538-5263

For the Peace River Region (Fort Vermilion, High Prairie, Manning, Three Creeks, Whitemud reserves), please contact:

Regional Manager
Peace River Grazing Reserves
Box 35, Provincial Building
Peace River, Alberta T0H 2X0

Telephone: 624-6109

Our final word: please help us keep the reserves clean by packing out everything you take in.

Thanks, and enjoy your visit.

INTRODUCTION

There are 32 provincial grazing reserves - administered by the Public Lands Division of Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife - scattered across Alberta.

Some of the reserves, or community pastures, are natural grassland, while others have been partially cleared and seeded to forage. They range in size from 5 962 acres (Purple Springs reserve, in the Lethbridge area) to 76 388 acres (Sage Creek reserve, in the southeastern corner of the province), but the overall average is close to 20 000 acres.

The main purpose of these reserves is to provide affordable summer pasture for Alberta farmers and ranchers on public land, enabling them to use their own land for crop and hay production.

However, in keeping with the government's multiple-use policy for public lands, the reserves also offer a variety of recreational opportunities, including hunting, hiking, trail riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, camping and just plain sight-seeing. Others who use grazing land are oil and gas well operators, pipeline companies, gravel haulers, seismic crews and firewood cutters. Large portions of the reserve also provide excellent habitat for wildlife.

To assist recreationists and other visitors, maps are posted at all reserves clearly showing access and designated routes. Designated routes are public vehicle access trails within the reserve. They give the general public optimum access to the reserve, while minimizing both damage to the grazing lands and conflicts with other users.

Alberta's first provincial grazing reserve was established near the southern border of the province during the bleak days of the depression, in response to a request from drought-stricken farmers. In the more than 50 years since then reserves have been set up throughout the province and now extend as far north as the High Level area. In 1986, more than 73 000 animals grazed on the reserves, which served 1 658 farmers and ranchers.

The reserve program is complementary to other grazing arrangements, not in competition. It serves patrons who cannot afford to take crop land out of production and who, for one reason or another, are unable to use a grazing lease.

Two important aims of all reserves are to operate on a cost recovery basis and to ensure a sustained yield from the pasture. Patrons are charged a grazing fee calculated on Animal Unit Month (A.U.M.) and pay for salt, minerals and pharmaceuticals. (An A.U.M. is forage provided for one animal unit - mature cow with calf or equivalent - for one month.)

Grazing reserves benefit the local economies in a number of ways, quite apart from the increased market value of the cattle that graze on them. Direct employment is provided for supervisors, seasonal riders and part-time employees, while construction and other projects use local contractors and suppliers where practical. Additional money is channeled into the community in the form of provincial grants paid to municipalities or counties in lieu of taxes on the pastureland. In 1986 these grants totalled $387 870.

Most of the funding for grazing reserve development in recent years has come from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund as part of a 10-year grazing reserve development program. Previously reserves were funded entirely from the province's general revenues.

The reserves are grouped into four regions of the province - Northeast, Peace River, Eastern Slopes and Central, and Southern. This booklet deals with the Peace River Region.

Most of the Peace pastures have been carved out of vacant undeveloped brushland. Developement of grazing reserves in this region received a major boost when the program for funding reserves through the Heritage Savings Trust Fund was established in 1977. Today provincial reserves account for 17% of all grazing in the Peace region and 30% of all grazing on Crown land.

With the Kleskun Lake reserve, Peace River is one of three regions in the province where sheep are grazed.

BEAR CANYON PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Development of the Bear Canyon Provincial Grazing Reserve started in 1977 and the first cattle grazed four years later. During the first year the patrons looked after their own cattle but a full-time supervisor was hired in 1982 and the reserve became fully operational.

Bear Canyon is located just east of the British Columbia border, about 16 km north of the Peace River in the northwestern quarter of Alberta. Half of the reserve's 20 288 acres have been cleared of brush and developed for pasture. The land is gently rolling, with many sloughs and muskeg areas. Wolf Creek bisects the pasture east to west, while a secondary road cuts through the area north to south.

At capacity the reserve can provide about 13 000 Animal Unit Months, or enough grazing for 5 000 cattle (cows, calves, yearlings and bulls) during the normal grazing season, which runs from mid-May to mid-October. Cattle may graze longer in the fall if there is sufficient grass, and sometimes horses can be grazed in winter months.

Oil and gas exploration has taken place on the reserve and two major gravel pits - one used for highways, the other for private work - are located on the property.

As it is located away from large population centres, the reserve is not heavily used for recreational activities. However, deer and moose are hunted in the fall months and there is also a limited amount of trail riding, picnicking and snowmobiling. Bear Canyon provides year-round access to recreational users but gates may be locked in fields where livestock is grazing or where construction is taking place.

The reserve, which has 32 patrons, is operated by a supervisor and one seasonal worker. Casual workers are hired when needed.

For information on access, location of livestock and local conditions, visitors should check with reserve headquarters, on SE33-84-12-W6 (telephone 595-3933).

BLUEBERRY MOUNTAIN PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Long before development work began on the Blueberry Mountain Provincial Grazing Reserve, the area 48 km northwest of Spirit River had been reserved for pasture use. Local residents called it "Moose Pasture" because of the large moose population found there.

The reserve is situated on a large hill that offers a good view of the surrounding area. It covers a total of 10 000 acres but only 5 800 have been developed for pasture. Funding for development of the reserve comes from the Capital Projects Division of Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. To date a total of $1 970 760 have been spent. Some of the developed acreage still requires further work, including the removal of rocks. Five sections of lower quality private property were purchased over the years in assembling the Blueberry Mountain land.

When fully developed, the reserve will accommodate about 2 500 cattle - cows, calves and bulls, with a few yearlings - during the mid-May to mid-October grazing season. This would be the equivalent to 6 000 Animal Unit Months. If there is extra forage available cows can be kept for a few weeks after the calves are taken out. Horses often graze the site during winter months.

There are 21 fields at Blueberry Mountain and a total of 51 miles of fence. Dugouts across the property provide the water. Twenty-three patrons graze cattle at the reserve, which is operated by two seasonal employees.

With its large moose population, the reserve is a favorite spot of local hunters in the fall. There is also some bear hunting on the property. Access for recreation is permitted in all parts of the reserve, except fields where livestock is grazing. This restriction serves a dual purpose -the protection of the cattle and the safety of the recreationist.

A great deal of seismic work has been carried out at Blueberry Mountain during recent years along with some drilling activity. However, there are no producing wells on the site.

Information on local conditions and maps of the reserve may be obtained from headquarters, on NE32-80-10-W6 (telephone 353-2515).

KLESKUN LAKE PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Early settlers found the shores of Kleskun Lake, about 32 km northeast of Grande Prairie, to be very productive and a good source of wild hay. The area was first used for grazing in 1912 after cattle were taken north along the Edson Trail.

In 1918 the Kleskun Lake Cattle Co. was formed and over the next few years it opened up the Kleskun Creek channel and put in lateral ditches to improve drainage. This made most of the lake bottom, about 15 000 acres, available for grazing or hay production.

At the peak of its operation, the Kleskun Lake Cattle Co. controlled 45 000 acres, but by 1927 it was having financial problems and sold out. During the depression most of the land reverted to the municipal government.

In the late 1960s, the provincial government obtained the original Kleskun Lake area from the County of Grande Prairie and development of the grazing reserve started in 1969. At present the reserve covers 13 747 acres, of which 11 000 are either native meadow or improved pasture.

Although the carrying capacity of Kleskun Lake is drastically affected by the amount of precipitation in the area, it is able to sustain about 11 000 Animal Unit Months. This means accommodating about 2 000 sheep and 2 000 cows, their calves and a few yearlings during the late May to early October grazing season.

Kleskun Lake is also used for winter grazing of horses. The ample sedge growth in the low areas is very nutritious and horses do well even in a fairly severe winter.

Hunting, snowmobiling and trail riding are the chief recreational activities on the reserve, which is also the site for oil exploration and trapping. A fairly extensive waterfowl staging area is planned in cooperation with Alberta Fish and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited and Alberta Environment. When completed this project will have flooded 2 000 acres, but by increasing water control on the rest of the property it will have raised the carrying capacity while providing additional waterfowl habitat.

Access to the reserve for recreational purposes is only restricted in fields where cattle are grazing. To obtain maps and information on local conditions, visitors should check with headquarters, on NE 1-73-4-W6, or telephone 567-2209.

VALLEYVIEW PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Problems of access delayed development of the Valleyview Provincial Grazing Reserve, located 19.2 km southwest of the town of Valleyview. Goose and Long lakes blocked access on the west, while several miles of muskeg cut off the south. There was no developed access to the north, and beaver dams were stretched along the east.

A good deal of work was required on the site itself, which was cut up by drainages and creeks and covered by aspen and stands of merchantable timber. There were also patches of muskeg across the 13 580-acre parcel. Work started in 1969 but it was not until 1977 that cattle were able to graze at Valleyview reserve.

Funding for development of the reserve comes from the Capital Projects Division of Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. To date a total of $1 191 890 have been spent on developing 5 830 acres, 16 grazing pastures and 43 miles of fences. This area provides a sustained carrying capacity of 7 000 Animal Unit Months or grazing for 1 500 cows and their calves and a small yearling herd. The 4½-month grazing season begins in late May and ends in mid-October.

In 1986 the reserve served 33 patrons. Staff consists of a supervisor and one seasonal employee.

Resource activity at Valleyview includes oil exploration and timber harvesting. With the abundant stands of birch in some areas, there has been a very large demand for firewood. Two registered traplines are located on the site.

On the recreational side, the reserve is used for hunting and snowmobiling. Areas not suitable for improved grazing are now being considered as sites for habitat improvement projects that will be carried out in cooperation with Alberta Fish and Wildlife. The goal is to increase the food supply for ungulates, mainly moose, and thus make the area an even better locale for hunting. Access for recreation purposes is permitted in all areas except fields where livestock is grazing.

Traces of the old Edson Trail can still be seen on the eastern side of the reserve, on SE1-69-23-W5. This trail was the only access to the Peace River region until the railway was built.

Local information and maps can be obtained at the reserve headquarters, on SW10-69-23-W5 (telephone 524-3584).

WANHAM PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

The Wanham Provincial Grazing Reserve, located 40 km northeast of Rycoft, covers 18 735 acres of rolling land dotted with small sloughs and patches of muskeg. Generally, there is low rainfall in the area, with the summer precipitation averaging 9 to 11 inches. This is often the key factor in limiting increased production.

Most of the area was homesteaded in 1948 through 1951 by veterans of the Second World War, but they faced major problems. It was probably a combination of low rainfall and poor access that caused most of them to abandon their homesteads. By 1960 the few remaining farmers were bought out by the provincial government, and the Wanham Provincial Grazing Reserve was established. As large areas of the homestead were already cultivated and seeded to forage, it was possible to take cattle to the reserve immediately.

Today, there are 14 400 developed acres at Wanham and, during the five-month grazing season that runs from mid-May to mid-October, the reserve can accommodate 2 500 cows and their calves, plus a few yearlings - 12 500 Animal Unit Months.

The reserve has been the scene of a great deal of oil exploration work in recent years. As for its other uses, it offers a number of recreational activities, including hunting, snowmobiling and trail riding. Wanham has a fairly large population of sharptail grouse, so it is an excellent site for upland bird hunting, and a pheasant release program is planned in cooperation with Alberta Fish and Wildlife.

A pasture rejuvenation program is under way and some 1 300 acres have been rented to local farmers for a few years. By the time this agreement expires the brush regrowth problems will have been brought under control.

Access to the reserve for recreational purposes is permitted in all areas except those where livestock is grazing. Maps and information on local conditions may be obtained at reserve headquarters, located on SE29-79-2-W6. The telephone number is 694-2348.

FORT VERMILION PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Intensified grazing was one of the objectives in developing the Fort Vermilion Provincial Grazing Reserve, about 60 km northeast of High Level. The 26 pastures on the 19 225-acre site vary in size from 230 to 580 acres. Thirty-eight dugouts scattered across the reserve supply water for the cattle.

First grazing on the flat pastureland took place in 1981, when the patrons had to look after their own cattle due to lack of accommodation on the property. In 1982 the Public Lands Division of Energy and Natural Resources began operating the reserve.

At that time there were only nine patrons who grazed 113 cows, 98 calves, 76 yearling heifers and six bulls on 2 400 acres of tame forage - 851 Animal Unit Months. By 1986 the number of patrons had climbed to 31 and the grazing herd consisted of 475 cows, 408 calves, 372 yearling heifers, 628 yearling steers and 34 bulls - 5 546 A.U.M.s of grazing on 8 500 acres of tame forage.

Five Alberta government departments or divisions participated in planning the multiple-use development of this reserve. Working on the project were Alberta Agriculture, Alberta Environment and three divisions of Alberta Energy and Natural Resources - Public Lands, Fish and Wildlife and Alberta Forest Service.

Funded through the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, the reserve was established to provide cattle producers with an alternative to grazing their cattle on deeded land which, it was believed, could be put to better use growing cereals, oil seed crops and forage. To date a total of $2 437 547 have been spend on development.

The site was chosen because the land was suitable - and available. Aspen forest was cleared to develop the pasture but a good deal of bush was left between the fields, ensuring habitat for wildlife.

Seismic crews operate in the area during winter months and one gas well is located on the reserve.

For information regarding the reserve, please check with headquarters, on SE 24-110-14-W5 (telephone 927-4597).

HIGH PRAIRIE PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

The High Prairie Provincial Grazing Reserve was developed under a multiple-use concept in which areas of bush were retained as wildlife habitat or left untouched for environmental reasons.

Only 10 300 acres - about 37 per cent of the total 28 204 - have been developed. Recreational activities on the site include deer and moose hunting, hiking and berry-picking.

The history of the reserve dates back to the early 1970s, when cattlemen in the High Prairie area were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain or enlarge their herds because of the high costs of purchasing and developing land. They asked Alberta Energy and Natural Resources to look into the possibility of establishing a grazing reserve in the region.

A site about 35 km northeast of High Prairie was chosen because it was centrally located in the main cattle area and had a good, accessible road. Another factor was that the land, both level and gently rolling, was marginal and unsuitable for homesteading.

Initial clearing of the site took place in the winter of 1976-77. Since then slightly more than 10 000 acres have been cleared, broken, worked down, root-raked and seeded to tame forage.

The reserve has been developed for intensified cattle grazing. Its 28 pastures, with 87 miles of fencing, range in size from 200 to 500 acres. Forty-three dugouts across the reserve supply the water.

During its first year of operation, 1982, the reserve had 14 patrons who placed 541 cows, 488 calves, 130 yearling heifers and 23 bulls in the 4 000 acres of pasture. This amounted to 3 352 Animal Unit Months of grazing. By contrast, in 1986 there were 37 patrons who grazed 1 097 cows, 987 calves, 745 yearling heifers, 625 yearling steers and 49 bulls on the reserve - 9 005 A.U.M.s on 10 300 acres of tame grass.

Some seismic activity has taken place on the reserve during winter months and at least one well is located on the site.

Funding for development of the reserve comes from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings

Trust Fund program established in 1977 to provide grazing reserves in northern and north central Alberta. A total of $3 143 817 have been spent to date.

The reserve headquarters are on SE 13-77-16-W5. All inquiries should be directed to the supervisor (telephone 523-2010).

MANNING PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

A limited amount of deer and moose hunting takes place on the Manning Provincial Grazing Reserve during the fall months. In winter cross-country skiers and snowmobilers take advantage of the flat terrain.

For several years there has been oil and gas exploration work on the reserve and wintertime seismic operations are ongoing.

It was an Agricultural Development Committee, along with local farmers, that proposed establishing the Manning reserve, 11.2 km northwest of the town.

In 1977 a planning committee was established to develop a multiple-use plan, with membership from Alberta Environment, Alberta Agriculture, and three divisions of Alberta Energy and Natural Resources - Public Lands, Alberta Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife. The plan was approved later that year and initial clearing of 1 630 acres was completed by early 1978.

Funding for development of the reserve comes from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. To date $1 979 442 have been spent developing 5 052 acres.

During the first year the reserve was operated by Public Lands, 12 patrons grazed 275 cows, 252 calves, 335 yearlings and 11 bulls on 1 630 acres, achieving 1 641 Animal Unit Months of grazing. By 1986 there were 18 patrons and the grazing herd was made up of 715 cows, 688 calves, 258 yearling heifers, 60 yearling steers and 29 bulls. The cattle, grazing 5 000 acres of tame forage, represented 4 517 A.U.M.s.

Pastures at the reserve range in size from 150 to 400 acres, in keeping with the development aim of intensified grazing. The topography is fairly level throughout, with a few small creeks winding across the property.

The grazing season normally runs five months, from the middle of May to the middle of October. Water for the cattle comes from 27 dugouts scattered across the 9 920-acre site.

Headquarters for the reserve are located on SE14-92-24-W5. From May 15 to October 30 the telephone number is 836-2376. During the rest of the year calls should be made to the Peace River regional office, 624-6109.

THREE CREEKS PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Heading the list of recreational activities at the multi-purpose Three Creeks Provincial Grazing Reserve are deer and moose hunting, but with the arrival of winter, cross-country skiers and snowmobilers use the 39 500-acre site, which is relatively flat except for some small hills in the western end.

Winter also brings seismic crews as part of the oil and gas exploration and development activity. Two wells are located on the reserve, which is 56.3 km northeast of Peace River.

The Three Creeks reserve was originally requested by the Agriculture Development Committee of ID 17 and eventually a site was chosen on a large tract of aspen-covered Crown Land.

As multiple uses were proposed for the reserve a number of provincial government departments and divisions participated in the planning. After the plan was approved in 1979 development of the site began under the supervision of the Grazing Reserve staff on the Public Lands Division.

Initial clearing of 2 253 acres on the eastern end of the reserve was completed in 1979 but it was not until 1982 that Public Lands first operated the pasture. That year Animal Unit Months of grazing totalled 1 970, with 267 cows, 264 calves, 151 yearling heifers and eight bulls grazing on the site. By 1986 the herd had grown to 1 054 cows, 1 032 calves, 58 yearling heifers, 890 yearling steers and 50 bulls grazing on 10 500 acres and achieving 8 698 A.U.M.s.

Funds for the Three Creeks reserve come from the Capital Projects Division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund as part of a 10-year grazing reserve development program. To date a total of $3 216 051 have been spent developing 11 200 acres.

Twenty-five patrons used Three Creeks in 1986. The reserve was operated by a supervisor and two seasonal employees.

For information on access to Three Creeks, visitors should call reserve headquarters, on NE2-86-19-W5. The telephone number is 624-8416.

WHITEMUD PROVINCIAL GRAZING RESERVE

Deer and moose hunting are probably the most popular recreational activities on the Whitemud Provincial Grazing Reserve, 22.5 km northwest of Dixonville, but there is also hiking, skiing, snowmobiling and berry-picking.

Resource activity in recent years has focused on natural gas, and four wells are now located on the property along with two gas compressors.

Whitemud takes in a total of 23 763 acres of undulating land, with the Whitemud River and several small creeks forming the main topographical features. Water for the cattle comes from 42 dugouts spread across the reserve.

In 1963 a group of Clear Hills district farmers met to discuss the possibility of setting up a grazing association on the site. The next year an inspection by the staff of what was then the Department of Lands and Forests found the land to be suitable only for grazing, thus clearing the way for the project to go ahead.

Initially the reserve was used by local people on a head tax basis because fencing was not completed until 1965. Two years later a parcel of deeded land was purchased and it now serves as the site of the reserve headquarters, on NE 24-87-26-W5. The first meeting of farmers wishing to graze cattle on the reserve was held on May 2, 1967 and an advisory board of five persons was chosen.

Clearing work started in December of that year and was carried out on a checker-board pattern to accommodate wildlife habitat. In the years since many of the areas originally left untouched have been cleared or reduced in size to permit cattle movement and to help in management of the reserve, but there is still a considerable amount of trees and bush outside the fields.

Today the reserve has about 10 500 acres of land that has been cleared, broken and seeded to tame forage. Fencing on the property totals about 65 miles.

The grazing season at Whitemud runs from May 15 to October 15, and in 1986 the pasture accommodated 1 082 cows, 1 018 calves, 643 yearling heifers, 498 yearling steers and 50 bulls, a total of 9 339 Animal Unit Months.

Information on access to the reserve is available from headquarters (telephone 971-2183).

For additional information on Alberta's grazing reserves, or to obtain extra copies of this booklet or copies of the other three booklets in the series, please write or telephone:

Information Centre
Alberta Forestry, Lands and Wildlife
Main Floor, Bramalea Building
9920 - 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2M4

Telephone 427-3590

Or call the nearest Public Lands Division office.

COMMENTS

Have you any comments or suggestions to make as a result of your visit to a grazing reserve? If so, we would like to hear from you. Please use the space provided below, then clip out this page and send it to the address at the bottom of the page.

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For Bear Canyon, Blueberry Mountain, Kleskun Lake, Valleyview, Wanham reserves:

Regional Manager
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